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ABSTRACT

Pupils need to experience a rich language arts curriculum. Each learner must have feelings of self-worth and acceptance of others in the classroom setting. Educational psychologists have long recommended that learners perceive that content acquired is integrated. English teachers have debated the merits of teaching isolated learnings in the curriculum. The correlated English curriculum was introduced in the early 1900s; the fused English curriculum came somewhat later. A first grade student teacher guided her young learners on a visit to the ecology area next to the school building. Pupils noticed the oak, walnut, and hickory trees, watched squirrels running around, and watched and listened to birds. An active discussion ensued upon returning to the classroom. The teacher wrote student-generated sentences on the chalkboard based on their observations. The ideas presented from the excursion were easy for learners to read. An integrated language arts curriculum goes one step further than the fused approach in that subject matter from diverse disciplines is related to the language arts areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Other student teachers have used other academic disciplines to develop their own personalized reading materials in an integrated curriculum. (RS)

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INTEGRATION OF CONTENT IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS

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INTEGRATION OF CONTENT IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS

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1992

Relationship of subject matter learned by the student is important. Educational psychologists have long recommended that learners perceive that content acquired is integrated. The debate over the separate subjects versus integration has a long history. When the writer first started his teaching career on the West Bank of the Jordan during the 1952-54 school years, he leaned rather heavily upon the use of the textbook method in English instruction. A highly separate subjects approach was inherent in these English textbooks. In the first lesson therein, students were to learn to place the end punctuation mark for interrogative, declarative, exclamatory, and imperative sentences. Sentences to be used were contained in the textbook lesson presentation. The next lesson emphasized placing commas correctly in sentences provided by the textbook author. This was followed in sequence by the seventh grade students learning about quotation marks, capitalization, and parts of speech emphasized in ordered lessons. Each student worked very hard on the diverse sequential lessons. They achieved much in terms of subject matter learned. Why? One explanation the writer has always given, among others, is that these students were largely refugees and with a high number of unemployed, approximately 40% in society, it was necessary to study and study hard to attempt to obtain a job. Even though six years of schooling was compulsory, there were not enough public schools to enroll all eligible pupils. Societies differ in term of how much effort learners are willing to put forth even though teaching materials are scarce and the highly abstract is emphasized in the language arts or English curriculum.

A major problem of the separate subjects curriculum is if students will be able to transfer what has been learned from one situation to another. Thus if students can place the end punctuation marks in correctly at the end of each sentence, are they able to use that which has been learned in a new situation? Will learners then become proficient in using periods, question marks, and exclamation marks in the useful, the functional, and the practical?

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English teachers began to debate the merits of teaching so many isolated leanings in the curriculum. The correlated English curriculum was then being introduced increasingly in the early 1900's. With correlation, students were taught proper punctuation as the need arose when writing. Punctuation and the writing of subject matter became one rather than separate entities. Students then used what had been learned in a functional situation. Proper punctuation is taught only as it is necessary to do so and that being when the learner engages in written composition.

Somewhat later, English teachers believed the curriculum to still be excessively fragmented with the correlated curriculum. The fused English curriculum then became increasingly in vogue. The fused curriculum stressed that all language arts become related in teaching-learning situations. Thus, speaking, listening, reading, and writing were to become integrated entities and not separated from each other.

A first grade student teacher (ST) supervised by the writer guided these young learners on a visit to the ecology area next to to the school building. Here in early October, pupils noticed acorns on oak trees, walnuts on walnut trees, and hickory nuts on hickory trees. Pupils watched carefully as two squirrels ran up and down selected trees. Across the fence red-winged blackbirds were calling their group together for migration to warmer areas of the southern part of the United States. Interest was indeed high on the part of the first graders. After coming back in to the classroom, the teacher asked if learners would like to tell about what had been observed. There were no problems with pupil participation in the discussion. The ST had to continually remind learners about giving everybody a chance to talk and where no one would dominate or refrain from participating. The ST then had pupils give a few sentences, rather slowly so they could be written on the chalkboard , pertaining to main ideas received from the excursion. Here is what the ST printed on the chalkboard in manuscript letters;

We picked acorns, walnuts, and hickory nuts from the ground. The nuts are good to use in counting, adding, and subtracting.

Later on, we will eat the walnuts. Walnuts have a very soft covering and a hard shell. The squirrels chatter away as if they are talking to each other and to us also.

Pupils seemingly enjoyed seeing their ideas printed on the chalkboard by the ST. They asked the ST if the recorded ideas could be read by the entire class. So, the ST pointed to words and phrases as they were read with the former's guidance. Learners truly desired to want to read the content as well as remember individual words. A few pupils became fascinated with wanting to read all of the ideas presented on the chalkboard. Three were able to read correctly all of what had been printed right after group reading of the content. Many pupils discovered that some words started with the same letter as other words or ended with the same letter.

The ideas presented from the excursion seemingly were easy for learners to read since they had personally experienced subject matter given for the ST to record on the chalkboard. Content recorded on the chalkboard was printed on a large sheet of paper using magic marker. The paper was saved, along with others that were later recorded, so that pupils could reread what had been read previously. Learners have an inward desire to reread content that is understood and enjoyed.

The approach used by the ST in the integrated language arts curriculum emphasized listening to ideas presented from the excursion, oral communication when individuals gave ideas for the ST to print, seeing ideas written down such as in the use of manuscript print, and reading the resulting writing with ST guidance. Content read by pupils emphasized the natural environment and science. The integrated curriculum goes one step further than the fused approach in that subject matter from diverse disciplines, science in this case, is related to the language arts areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. ST's supervised by the writer have also used other academic disciplines than science for developing their own personalized reading materials in an integrated curriculum. Thus, in a social studies unit on OUR LOCAL CITY, learners viewed a delightful filmstrip on a city . After viewing and

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discussing the filmstrip, pupils asked the ST to write their related ideas on the chalkboard. The following were presented by learners;

The city has many cars and buses.
It is a very busy place.
Many people shop in the stores.
Policemen keep order in the city.
Street sweepers help to maintain a clean place.
Many workers are employed in the city including firemen.

Another class of first grade pupils wanted to have a written record of what was done in arithmetic on a certain day. They desired to have the record in verse form. Learners had been working with rhyming words a few days earlier. The following couplet resulted;

We counted by twos
by using our shoes.

Two pupils cooperatively with ST assistance developed the following triplet;

I love to count money
when the weather is sunny
I do think it is funny.

Pupils in committees shared their written content with others. Respect for the thinking of others is important.

In Closing

Pupils need to experience a rich language arts curriculum. A variety of activities will then be in evidence. Each learner must have feelings of self-worth and acceptance of others in the classroom setting. Learners need to place more of their very own thinking into the writing curriculum. Trust in the self for generating quality ideas is a must. That which is within the learner must come to the surface. The surface

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consists of confidence in expressing one's own thoughts, feelings, and values. An adequate self-concept needs to be developed to attain more optimally, be it in listening, speaking, reading, or writing. Each pupil has unique content which is worthy of presenting to others. Challenges to learners become opportunities to attain, grow, develop, and achieve. Pupils need to be praised when presenting the unique, novel, and the original. The integrated curriculum in language becomes a major goal for pupils to acquire.